

LYNCHBURG CITY COUNCIL

Agenda Item Summary

MEETING DATE: **February 28, 2006, Work Session**

AGENDA ITEM NO.: 2

CONSENT:

REGULAR: **X**

CLOSED SESSION:

(Confidential)

ACTION:

INFORMATION: **X**

ITEM TITLE: **Report of the Museum Director**

RECOMMENDATION: None

SUMMARY: Museum Director Doug Harvey will make his first presentation to Council on the status of a number of issues related to the museum system. The attached memorandum provides information on the issues.

PRIOR ACTION(S): N/A

FISCAL IMPACT: N/A

CONTACT(S): Kimball Payne, 455-3990; Lynn Dodge, 455-6301; Doug Harvey, 847-1459

ATTACHMENT(S): Memorandum to City Council dated February 3, 2006

REVIEWED BY: lkp

TO: City Council
FROM: Doug Harvey, Museum Director
DATE: February 3, 2006
RE: Lynchburg Museum System - Briefing for 2/28/06 Work Session

Tom Ledford's last briefing to Council was on March 22, 2005 and in it, he talked about the Museum System's solid foundation and several important goals for the future. Having just completed my first 90 days on the job, Kim Payne asked me to share with you my observations.

First off, I agree with Tom that the foundation is solid. The Old Court House (OCH) has been beautifully restored and the structures at Point of Honor (POH) are in excellent physical shape—house, kitchen, and carriage house. There are 20,000 plus artifacts, books, and photographs in our collections donated by people who love Lynchburg and its history.

As a result of the collapse of the OCH ceiling in 2000, the museum moved the artifacts and the administrative offices to the Business Development Centre. There are dedicated board members, volunteers, and staff on the scene and a City that has an increasing awareness of the broad benefits of our history, tourism, and adaptive reuse of old buildings. These are some of the important issues for the Museum System that I see at present:

Point of Honor, Inc: The operating contract with the City and Wachovia Bank Trust that holds title to the property has been in place for about 30 years but it is complex with multiple boards and legal documents. The relationship of POH to the City and the Museum System is not widely understood in the community and there is some confusion about the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved. The POH Board of Managers (Advisory) is moving toward a planning study which will include a review of the contract and other documents.

Old Court House: The building cannot contain all the holdings of the Museum System, but it is our largest and grandest artifact. To fully bring it to life with quality exhibits will require about \$950,000 of which we have \$360,000 on hand. Our current thought is to use the existing funds to open the building, create exhibits in the main courtroom that will show the history of Lynchburg, how the courts functioned, and still leave floor space for special events and ceremonies. We also would create special theme galleries in the rear rooms that would cover topics such as the people of Lynchburg, native Americans, railroads, antique toys, aviation, etc. We will carry the exhibits as far as the available funds will take us. We will use part of the second floor for administrative offices and store most of the heavy reference material on the basement level which is on a slab.

The location of the OCH brings some challenges as a museum—it is off the main thoroughfares of the City, parking is limited, and there are no shops or restaurants very close by for visitor amenities. It is, however, the most recognizable building in the City in a commanding location and there are ways to mitigate some of the challenges—designate parking for museum visitors only and add more directional signage, for example.

Museum Annex: Since additional room is needed for artifact storage and other functions, these questions arise: where should the Annex be located, what functions will be housed there, how will we staff another site if it is open to the public? Should it be located near other historic attractions to generate more tourism, a part of the Mid-town initiative to jump start redevelopment, do we include other museum partners, and how much will it cost?

Our meeting with Kim Payne and Bonnie Svrcek led to these possible scenarios for the Annex: acquire a building in downtown and adapt it, build a new building on vacant land on the 5th Street Corridor, acquire a site near The Plaza, a site near Point of Honor, or use the church adjacent to the Old Court House.

We agreed that wherever the Annex is located, realistically it will be in place for 20-30 years based on other Virginia museum experiences and that different locations within the City have the potential to yield different positive outcomes.

Museum Study: To help focus our efforts, staff plans to hire a museum consultant to develop a museum Annex study that can identify the opportunities that exist for the City and how to maximize any investment. There are a number of firms within driving distance of Lynchburg that provide this type of service. An amount of \$360,000 is budgeted in the FY 2006 CIP for Old Courthouse Exhibits. Some of these funds (\$20,000 - \$30,000) will be used for a focused study of short duration. A meeting with Council and other community leaders would be part of the scope of work. It is anticipated that the study would be completed by June 2006.